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COLD WEATHER A THREAT TO THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF THE POOR

SACRAMENTO – Predictions this week of a severe cold front due in Central and Northern California, including the Bay Area, have prompted state officials to work closely with community partners to provide information and assistance to the poor and other vulnerable populations.

Governor Schwarzenegger directed state government to prepare for the extremely cold temperatures and put 16 additional warming centers on standby to supplement local sheltering needs (<http://gov.ca.gov/index.php?/press-release/5114/>).

California Department of Community Services and Development (CSD) Director Lloyd Throne joined state emergency and health officials in urging low-income, vulnerable Californians to prepare for the extreme cold weather. There are many low- or no-cost actions individuals and families can take to reduce the impact of the extreme cold. Web sites for CSD (www.csd.ca.gov), local or state Office of Emergency Services (www.oes.ca.gov) and local or state Department of Health Services (www.dhs.ca.gov) all offer tips to help protect against the impact of extreme cold weather.

“Preparation is key, but even the most prepared household may not have the resources to provide a safe and healthy environment in extreme temperatures,” said Throne. “To save money, some families heat their households in a way that increases the risk of fire or carbon monoxide poisoning. There are community-based programs that can help low-income individuals and families maintain a safe and healthy home.”

Throne said he was particularly concerned that people who may not have asked for assistance in the past may be particularly vulnerable, given the possibility of extremely low temperatures. He urged family and friends to check on those who are isolated, ill or elderly and assist them in accessing help.

“We’ve asked our 46 community providers throughout the state who administer federal low-income energy grant programs in their communities to fund assistance programs to low-income individuals and families, who are also often elderly, very young or disabled and particularly vulnerable to the effects of hypothermia,” Throne said. “Our community providers are prepared with a number of programs to help those suffering from the cold.”

In 2006, CSD distributed more than \$150 million in Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funds to its community provider network. LIHEAP services include weatherization assistance, such as attic insulation, weather-stripping and minor housing repairs, in addition to emergency and financial assistance to offset the high costs of home energy.

Throne suggested a series of no-cost or low-cost tips to mitigate the effects of cold weather:

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No-Cost Tips:

- Wear layers of loose-fitting clothes, such as thermal underwear, sweaters, sweatshirts, sweatpants and socks to trap body heat.
- Open drapes to let the sun heat your home during the day and close them at night to help insulate your home.
- Close off unused rooms and the vents that heat those rooms.
- Keep warm-air registers, baseboard heaters and radiators clean and ensure they aren't blocked by furniture, carpeting or drapes.
- Move furniture around so you are sitting near interior walls instead of exterior walls and windows.
- Close your fireplace damper tightly when not in use.
- Insulate the water pipes leading from your hot water heater.

Health and Safety Tips:

- Install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in your home.
- Provide proper venting systems for all heating equipment.
- Never use your range or oven to heat your home or use a BBQ in your home or garage.
- Place space heaters on level, hard and nonflammable surfaces, not on carpets or rugs.
- Keep space heaters at least three feet from bedding, drapes, furniture and other flammable materials.
- Never leave a space heater on when you go to sleep or leave the area.
- Watch children and pets closely in rooms with heating equipment.
- Always use generators outdoors and away from doors, windows and vents.

For more information about weatherization services or LIHEAP, call (866) 675-6623. For a list of providers in your community, log on to www.csd.ca.gov.

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